



Decentralized Wastewater Treatment Systems: Memorandum of Understanding

On November 9, 2011, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and 16 national organizations signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU), joining forces and renewing their commitment to work together to improve wastewater treatment for over 26 million homes nationwide. The MOU formalizes the ongoing cooperative relationship between EPA and its MOU partners to work collaboratively at the national level to improve decentralized performance and our nation's public health and water resources.

Decentralized wastewater systems, also known as septic or onsite systems, are used in nearly 20 percent of homes across the country and in nearly one-quarter of all new housing and commercial development. When properly sited, designed and maintained, these systems can treat wastewater effectively and protect surface water and groundwater. However, inadequately treated sewage from decentralized systems poses risks to human health and the environment. An estimated 10 to 20 percent of such systems in the United States may not be adequately treating wastewater.

In January 2005, EPA issued a program strategy for its Decentralized Wastewater Program, which identified EPA's vision, mission, and actions to improve the performance of decentralized systems and was intended to facilitate collaboration between the many organizations working in this area. One of the components of the program strategy was the development of an MOU among EPA and organizations involved in managing decentralized wastewater systems.

On January 12, 2005, EPA signed its first MOU with eight partner organizations, formalizing the cooperative relationship for this program. The original MOU focused on strengthening the relationship between the organizations and initiating collaborative efforts aimed at improving the credibility and professionalism within the industry. A renewal of this MOU was held on November 19, 2008, in which

Decentralized Waste Treatment System 2011 MOU Partners

- Association of Clean Water Administrators (ACWA)
- Association of State and Territorial Health Officials (ASTHO)
- Association of State Drinking Water Administrators (ASDWA)
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)
- Consortium of Institutes for Decentralized Wastewater Treatment (CIDWT)
- National Association of Towns and Townships (NATaT)
- National Association of Wastewater Transporters (NAWT)
- National Environmental Health Association (NEHA)
- National Environmental Services Center (NESC)
- National Onsite Wastewater Recycling Association (NOWRA)
- NSF International
- Ground Water Protection Council (GWPC)
- Rural Community Assistance Partnership, Inc (RCAP)
- State Onsite Regulators Alliance (SORA)
- Water Environment Federation (WEF)
- Water Environment Research Foundation (WERF)

six additional organizations signed on. Today's MOU signing expands this partnership to 16, with the addition of both the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and NSF International.

The purpose of the renewed MOUs, first in 2008 and now again in 2011, is to continue and expand the ongoing collaborative relationships and to add organizations which focus on public health protection, product testing, and professional accreditation. The addition of both CDC and NSF International will enhance the partnership's access and understanding of relevant public health research, priorities, and initiatives along with state-of-the-art product certification and testing and professional accreditation.

The MOU partners have achieved a number of successes in encouraging proper management of decentralized systems and increasing collaboration among EPA, state and local governments, and practitioners and assistance providers. Specifically, the partnership has supported a credentialing program for decentralized system installers and a model decentralized system performance code, training opportunities and improved curriculum consistency to enhance the competencies of decentralized installers and maintenance professionals, coordinated research priorities, and a wiki website to serve as a one-stop shop for sharing decentralized wastewater information.

How to Get Additional Information

For more information, please visit the Web at: www.epa.gov/owm/onsite, or contact Maureen Tooke, Office of Wastewater Management, by phone at (202) 564-1162 or via email at tooke.maureen@epa.gov.